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AND RELATED AGENCIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS,
AND RELATED PROGRAMS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY

**COMMITTEE ON
ETHICS**



Grace Meng

Congress of the United States

Sixth District, New York

March 19, 2020

**CONGRESSIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC
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President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Amid the economic and emotional shock our nation is currently facing as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic, we must address the serious threat the virus poses to some of the most vulnerable populations, including children, the homeless, low-income households, and immigrant communities. We must deploy immediate resources to decrease the intensity and mitigate long-term harm of COVID-19. I urge you to address the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.

HOUSING

An estimated 23 million low-income Americans pay more than half of their income in rent. The temporary economic hardship as a result of the coronavirus can put many of these low-income individuals at increased risk of foreclosure or eviction. Additionally, on a single night in 2019, there were over half a million individuals who experienced homelessness. These individuals often suffer from underlying health conditions and live in densely populated areas where they are most at risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19. As such, I urge you to do the following:

- Establish a moratorium by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding foreclosures and evictions – especially for individuals living in federally-subsidized housing, including public housing
- Establish an emergency assistance fund for individuals at risk of homelessness for emergency rental assistance, emergency mortgage assistance, and supplemental support for federal housing.
- Ensure residents, especially Medicare and Medicaid enrollees, of HUD-assisted and USDA-assisted properties have on-site healthcare assistance and access to food, medication, and other vital necessities.
- Support resources for the McKinney-Vento Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and short-term rental assistance, like the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), including, at a minimum, \$5 billion for ESG, and \$5 billion for short-term financial assistance and housing stabilization services.
- Support \$1 billion in FEMA emergency food and shelter grants, of which menstrual hygiene products are allowed purchasable items.
- Provide guidance on sanitation and hygiene of homeless service providers and outreach workers; considerations for staffing issues and coverage given the increasing number of infected individuals; and resources for immediate self-quarantining for the infected.
- Encourage cities and states to negotiate with utilities to temporarily halt water and sewage payments.

HOSPITALS

Hospitals and health care systems are on the frontlines of this pandemic and taking historic steps, including postponing all non-urgent surgeries and rationing out personal protective equipment, to cope with the strain on manpower and resources. Consequently, hospitals are likely to be facing funding issues as the costs to respond

to this unprecedented public health crisis increase. The upcoming Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) cuts, which is currently delayed to May 22, 2020, to safety net hospitals will be harmful to our health systems. This is a program that provides payments to hospitals that serve low-income communities to offset their uncompensated care losses from treating high rates of Medicaid and uninsured individuals. I urge you to:

- Work with Congress to delay Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) cuts for two and a half years.
- Authorize the Army Corps of Engineers to retrofit existing military facilities across the nation into temporary medical facilities to help hospitals manage this crisis.

EDUCATION

The health and safety of over 56 million students and over 6.4 million teachers and staff members in our nation's public schools must be a top priority in the COVID-19 response. Additionally, with the continued school closures, more and more students are being forced to do remote learning, despite over 12 million K-12 students who are part of the "homework gap," meaning they are without broadband at home. There is also a disproportionate impact of children from low-income households who heavily rely on key services, such as school meals, after school programs, and other social, physical health, and mental health services. Furthermore, I strongly urge you to ensure additional financial harm is not inflicted upon students. As such, I urge you to:

- Ensure that \$1 billion in FEMA disaster funds for all kids to have broadband connectivity.
- Recommend the Department of Education to provide guidance on extending school services and wrap-around services.
- Prioritize the support for the 30 million low-income children around the country that receive a low-cost or free lunch at school each day at 100,000 public and non-profit schools.
- Provide emergency grants to students to return home or purchase food and hygiene products.
- Institute a moratorium on the capitalization of interest and student loan payments.
- Recommend that the full-time working requirement is waived for monthly Public Student Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) payments.
- Establish mobile clinics, food and hygiene pantries, and free mobile hotspot rentals for students.

2020 DECENNIAL CENSUS

Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution mandates that the U.S. counts its population every ten years. It is imperative that we do everything possible to ensure a complete and accurate census count, including overcoming the barriers that COVID-19 poses. This pandemic will likely result in the need to do further outreach, especially since social distancing will make enumeration practically impossible during the current allotted time frame. As such, I urge the Administration to:

- Extend the enumeration period through September for the 2020 Decennial Census.

IMMIGRATION

COVID-19 does not distinguish one's immigration status. This outbreak is not yet contained and from a public health standpoint, we need every symptomatic individual to seek medical attention. Individuals who are undocumented, however, may not come forward for fear of any immigration enforcement actions that may follow. We must also protect all individuals involved within the immigration court system, including judges, staff, attorneys, and respondents. As such, I urge you to:

- Ensure the U.S. Immigration Customs and Enforcement adheres to its policy on not performing any immigration enforcement at or around hospitals or other health facilities, which are deemed as sensitive locations per ICE.
- Suspend its immigration enforcement activities to temper down fear of immigrants being detained during this public health crisis, otherwise ICE is putting people's health and lives at risk.
- Close immigration courts to protect Immigration Judges, Immigration Court staff, and the public until health officials can ensure a safe working environment for immigration court hearings.
- Conduct bond redetermination hearings telephonically.

WORKFORCE

Federal Employees

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) provided guidance for federal agencies to maximize telework for the federal workforce, especially for high-risk and vulnerable populations. But there still must be a clear mandate to all federal employees, as well as federal contractors, to transition to telework. As the largest employer in the country, our government must prioritize the health and safety of its workforce, including those contractors who work alongside the employees.

- I urge the administration to immediately issue an Executive Order mandating telework for all eligible federal employees and contractors.

Labor Workforce

The labor force is undeniably the backbone of our economy and of communities across our nation. However, many contracted workers do not have the same labor protections in place, including paid family and medical leave, as federal employees.

- I urge you to support expansion of paid family and medical leave for all workers, and expansion of employer-based health care to cover necessary medical costs associated with this pandemic.

Health Care Workforce

Health care workers on the frontlines of this pandemic are performing their duties in the face of increased personal risk and strain. These medical professionals are having their work hours increased significantly, often voluntarily, and many of them will have to quarantine themselves from their children to prevent community spread of COVID-19. These brave workers must have the resources they need to ensure their children are taken care of. Failure to do so would significantly hamper the health care system's ability to respond to this crisis.

- I urge you to work with Congress to ensure that the Federal COVID-19 response includes funding child care benefits for our health care workforce.

FAMILIES

Millions of families are already food insecure, and many more rely on hourly salaries or meals provided in schools to ensure that they are fed. Families living from paycheck to paycheck do not have the financial flexibility to stock up on food or household supplies for weeks in advance. The Families First Act included \$1 billion for food security programs, including those who rely on SNAP, food banks, and free and reduced lunch, but more will be needed. As such, I ask that you to:

- provide immediate cash assistance to all families impacted by this public health crisis, so that this cash infusion will help relieve the economic crisis they are also facing.
- Increase funding for SNAP, WIC, and meal delivery services for children and the elderly.
- Loosen restrictions on products and expiration dates for WIC vouchers. Items that are eligible for WIC vouchers are increasingly unavailable as families are trying to purchase groceries in advance.
- Do not implement the public charge rule change during this crisis. Formalizing a rule change that institutes work requirements for SNAP recipients cut more than 700,000 people off the program. While I have argued that this rule should never be implemented, at the very least, it should not be implemented during this unprecedented moment of job insecurity for many hourly workers.

SMALL BUSINESSES

Our nation is experiencing profound changes to our daily lives and small businesses are not exempt from the effects of COVID-19. I urge you to:

- Ensure small businesses receive additional grants, zero-interest loans, and tax relief.
- Ensure small businesses can access emergency loans even if they have existing credit.
- Convene a task force comprised of relevant cabinet officials, House and Senate leadership, and government agencies to identify and develop proposals that provide additional support for small

businesses, including paths for cities and states to negotiate with utility providers and banks to temporarily halt water, sewage, mortgage, and other loan payments.

- Utilize the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund to support small businesses by matching funds and limitations.

PRISONS

Incarcerated populations are at high risk of becoming infected with COVID-19, given their close living quarters, and compromised sanitation and hygiene standards. I strongly urge you to:

- Support the “Natural Disaster Safe Inmate Relocation Act,” which would require the FEMA Administrator to encourage states and localities that receive assistance under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to adopt policies regarding the safe relocation of prisoners before, during, and after major disasters and emergencies.
- Immediately release highly vulnerable incarcerated individuals, including the elderly and those with the most urgent health care needs.
- Provide education and training to incarcerated individuals, corrections staff, and visitors in order to minimize risk of contracting and spreading the virus.
- Provide guidance including comprehensive testing protocol and precautionary measures with respect to sanitation and hygiene; plans for housing people infected individuals; and bar the use of solitary confinement or lockdowns.

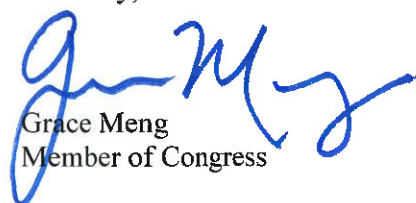
DISCRIMINATION

As Vice Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, I have continued to warn the public and my congressional colleagues to not single out the Asian American community. There is already a rise in assault and bullying against the Asian American community as a result of this inaccurate and dangerous attribution of COVID-19 to our community. Additionally, your own health officials have deemed it inaccurate and harmful to associate a place to COVID-19. To this end, I urge you to:

- End descriptions of COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus,” Ensure government officials, public officials, and those in the media do not perpetuate stereotypes or discriminatory stigma when describing COVID-19 relating to Chinese American and other Asian American groups.
- Ensure all guidance, outreach information and services be provided in multiple languages.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this serious matter. We look forward to your response and working with you to address this important issue.

Sincerely,



Grace Meng
Member of Congress

cc:

The Honorable Michael Pence, Vice President, Chair, White House Coronavirus Task Force
The Honorable Benjamin S. Carson, Sr., M.D., Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
The Honorable William P. Barr, U.S. Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice
The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
The Honorable Betsy DeVos, Secretary, U.S. Department of Education
The Honorable Chad F. Wolf, Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Jovita Carranza, Administrator, U.S. Small Business Administration
The Honorable Dale Cabaniss, Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management